

Mary Miele ([00:03](#)):

Welcome to Be Evolved, a podcast for parents and educators who prioritize developing possibility and expansion within the total educational process for themselves and their children or students. We invite you to listen to the podcast with your child or student in mind and with yourself at the center of the learning experience. Ultimately, our goal is to bridge the gap between educational expertise and research, translating it into practical action. Gaining knowledge plus taking action is what it means to be evolved. Hello everyone. Welcome to be evolved. This is our July edition in the middle of summer. We are hopefully all having a fabulous summer and we just actually got off an amazing workshop that Becky Reba, who's here today with us in this podcast, gave around the summer slide and she gave so much really great advice to us to help us all as parents to keep our kids active.

([01:05](#)):

So I hope as you're listening to this, that you come over to our site and get in touch with Becky to get the recording on that. And also today we're going to be talking about one of the most fundamental, and yet I think fairly misunderstood topics of education, which is having to do with motivation. And certainly it's so important for parents to understand this topic, I think because it's really helpful for us to be able to know how we can get our kids to be engaged, and if they're not engaged, what do we do about it? That's a really great, great question. So to guide us through this topic, I'm really happy to have today to amazing experts that we can get a lot of really great information from. One is Becky Reback, who's our director here at Evolved of Assessment and Parent Education. Joining us is Mandy Grass, a behavior analyst educator and parent coach. Mandy has worked extensively with families in schools to help children thrive by understanding what drives their actions and how we can support meaningful behavior change. Becky Mandy, welcome to the show.

Mandy Grass ([02:19](#)):

Thanks so much for having me. Happy to be here.

Mary Miele ([02:22](#)):

Okay, so let's get to it. So let's kind of start at the foundation. In the world of behavior analysis, we often hear about four or sometimes five functions of behavior. What are they and why do we care about them?

Mandy Grass ([02:38](#)):

Sure. So there's four functions of behavior, attention, escape, access to something tangible and then automatic or sensory. The fifth possible function that's highly debated is control or autonomy. So just to break those down a little bit further, attention the kid who is sitting at the counter doing their homework and every time you walk away this, I can't do this, escape the kid who is supposed to be emptying the dishwasher and has a stomach ache every time access the classic, I want that lollipop in the grocery store and I'm going to scream. And then automatic or sensory behaviors could be things like thumb sucking or stemming their behaviors that are internally reinforced. When it comes down to the debate about control or autonomy, my personal perspective is what are they trying to control? And usually that's access to something or escaping something or controlling when they engage in an activity. So the functions of behavior help us to determine the best, most appropriate intervention. Often as parents, we assume a function, and if we inaccurately assume it, we can intervene inappropriately, which might reinforce the behavior causing it to occur more often.

Mary Miele ([03:43](#)):

So give me an example of that. So let's say the child's at the store and they really want, is that a good example of something you might confuse?

Mandy Grass (03:52):

Yeah, they really want something. Okay. But I have a really good one. I had my 4-year-old the other day wanted footy jammies. It's July. I was like, footy jammies are no longer a choice and I'm really proud of myself. I'm like, it's access and I will not give her access to these pajamas, and I'm putting laundry away. And every two minutes I'm like, they're no longer a choice. They're no longer a choice. And I had to go downstairs to put some laundry away and I hear her coming and I was like, if this kid is in footy jammies, and she came down and she was in regular jammies, and it was in that moment I was like, Ooh. It wasn't about the jammies, it was about my attention. So the second I removed my attention, she went and put on the other pajamas, but I unintentionally engaged with her for 20 minutes giving her tons of attention about the footy jammies, which were not really about the footy jammies. So that's an example of where it can get confusing about the function.

Becky Reback (04:37):

It's interesting you say that because I've been going through this a lot with my own child where she asks a question and I say no and give an explanation. And it's a sound explanation. I mean, literally last night she asked for me and her to go get ice cream, which we've been doing just the two of us just so she has some special time together. And I said, no, she had had ice cream at camp and dessert after dinner. So I was like, we're not now at 7:00 PM going to get ice cream. And then she kept, please, I want, please, please. And so finally I just said, you asked, I answered the question, you need to accept my answer. I'm done talking about this. And she kept talking and I usually I do this, I say, I'm going to ignore you now. And I stopped answering. And when she talked to me about something else, I answered that

(05:27):

(05:27):

But I did not answer the ice cream question or the wine like, oh, I really want ice cream, because I had already given her the explanation and it was legitimate. So it's interesting with the craving your attention, I did not even think that in the moment that she just wanted my attention, which I get because she wanted to do the special thing with me, but the second I shut it down, she kind of moved on.

Mandy Grass (05:52):

Right. Well, you did a great thing. So in behavior analysis, the other part of this is replacement behavior. So behavior you want to decrease should have a replacement behavior you want to increase. So to your point about ignoring, you did that perfectly, you outline how to get your attention. So basically you were like, I'll be happy to talk to you about any other topic. And so she knows exactly how to get your attention. She's not upping the ante to other things. She knows exactly what to do. But similarly, a bedtime one is another really good example. I was working with a family and the mom was like, it's escape. He won't brush his teeth. I'm not letting him get away with it. And I was like, Ooh, I think it's attention. And I was like, so tonight I want you to say when you've brushed your teeth, then we can read. And she texted me at like 8 35 and I was like, it took two minutes. So it's like that function really, really matters and can make a big difference, especially if you wrongfully assume that escape one is a big one as that just came up in both of those examples.

Mary Miele (06:41):

So how do you know what's the assessment as a mom? Let's say I'm sort of looking at my kids, I mean in the moment, how do you gain those kinds of skills to be able to understand what it is that's going on?

Mandy Grass (06:52):

So really you have to look for patterns of behavior and you're looking for mostly how you are responding. So if you're seeing that, let's take that bedtime example, and I didn't let 'em went out and it took 25 minutes in the next day it took 30 minutes in the next day it took 30 minutes. That data is trending the wrong direction. So that's three data points that are showing us this might not be right. And they usually don't get it right The first time I say to everyone, it takes me five exchanges before I realize I'm in a power struggle. And I'm like, oh, okay. And then I remove my attention. So really it's just looking for patterns. And if you've tried the same thing multiple times and it's not changing, then you might want to look at how you're responding and how you might be able to respond differently.

Mary Miele ([07:31](#)):

Got it. Interesting. And then when you have a child who, let's say you're new to all of this, your parenting your child, and you're kind of thinking about, okay, I'm in this power struggle. So it sounds like you were saying time is sort of an indicator if something is taking you a really long time to get them to do something or to get through a task that would be an indication that you're on the wrong kind of response track. Right. So do you help parents to have a menu of options to try out to see if that time can be decreased? Is that sort of the skill process that you would take?

Mandy Grass ([08:09](#)):

Sure. So we can decrease a variety of ways, frequency, duration, intensity. And one of the things that's highly effective is errorless modeling. So again, Becky just said it. She told her daughter, exactly what I'm looking for you to say is okay, mommy. And so sometimes we forget about that. And the other thing that we as parents, myself included, I have three children do, is we operate in these extremes and we forget to teach and to shape behavior. For example, we were talking about tantrums this morning, and if my daughter, I cut her toast wrong and she threw a colossal tantrum, but sometimes we're like, you are going to eat the toast. You're like, whoa, whoa, whoa, I'm going to make more toast. Where there's this middle ground of like, mommy, could you cut that toast differently please? And you might go and make a new piece of toast.

([08:52](#)):

Now some people might be like, you're just going to make a new piece of toast. She requests. Well, yes, because my first thing I want to reduce is the screaming communication. If I can get to a point where she's requesting, well, then I can work on tolerating. But if we don't have that, we sometimes are like they need to tolerate and we miss all these steps in between. Then your analysis is called shaping. What are the small steps we want to take towards where we want to go? And we also talk about social significance. So in my home, the screaming at me might be my priority. I would rather she politely requests. If she politely requests, I'm going to honor it. Once we get to honoring it regularly, the screamings decrease requesting, then I'm going to work on first you're going to have your strawberries, then your piece of toaster. I already cut it this way tomorrow. You can have whatever that might look like, but we sometimes skip that first part.

Mary Miele ([09:36](#)):

Interesting, interesting. Yeah, and I would say I have older kids now, so I have teenagers. So I'm just sort of thinking about this in a connective way to that. And something that I think we all are struggling with, I would say even the adults in their family is just when we misstep or we make a mistake going, you were talking about extremes. It's kind of like either it's like you're always doing this, and then it's this internal dialogue that we all have that sets us off. And my kids call it crashing. It's like, oh, mom's crashing. Oh, dad's crashing, this kid's crashing, whatever. And I guess I wonder, let's say you take that example, what are some things that you can teach all of us to do that you're talking about, which is taking away the extreme and go into the middle and teach something a little bit more specific to maybe be more helpful.

Mandy Grass ([10:30](#)):

So along those lines, this is a little bit tangential, but name without blame. So focusing on what the problem is rather than whose fault it is, you always yell at me, you asked me to do this so my room isn't clean. Instead just being like, my room's not clean. What do I need to do? Kind of moving forward, and again, talking about some of that social emotional learning, talking about I statements versus you statements, all of those things that they're so interwoven in behavior as well. The one thing we want to be careful about again is these patterns. So one thing with my older daughter and throughout the ages, but especially as you get to teenagers, is that negative. So I'm raising three girls, so that negative self-talk elicits that like, oh, no, no, no. We are so worried about that, so much more knowledgeable than our parents.

([11:16](#)):

But it can also from a behavioral lens become this escape or this way to get attention happened with one of my daughters. So I started really outlining for her awareness around her feelings. So it seems like you need my attention right now. You can say, can you please talk to me? Or Can we have a moment? My daughter's love, can I talk to you to the side for a minute? Because I don't want to teach them to speak negatively about themselves to get external validation. So getting them to recognize what their feelings are and recognize what they need. This is my middle through and through, but now she's very fabulous at it. I really feel like you're not paying attention to me. There's three of you zone defense, but I hear you. Then I can set a plan for her needs to be met in that capacity.

([11:58](#)):

So yeah, same thing with our kids that you always and that can cause what's the reaction it causes for us and what is the function of our behavior, which is often in my case, attention. I'll get on the lecture team. I've given my daughter permission, I guess maybe that's not the right word to be like you're piling on because my mom was a repeater. I am a repeater. When I get on that lecture train and she's like, you're piling on. I'm like, ah, okay, fair. I'll stop now. So some of those things to help us with our own,

Becky Reback ([12:25](#)):

I like that you're piling on. I definitely pile on

Mandy Grass ([12:30](#)):

And it's hard because what? He's like, no, I'm not. I'm like, okay. So one day I was really frustrated. We were getting out in the car, we were driving somewhere and I was like, I really need you to work on this, this and this. And then I was like, and luckily for you, I was very concise and I didn't repeat myself at all. And she looked at me and I was like, no. Okay. So I could work on that as well. I definitely repeated myself, I'm aware, that kind of thing.

Mary Miele ([12:51](#)):

Yeah, I think it's great to model just that you're learning too. It's a big deal here at Evolve. We constantly talk to parents about that and just I think anyone listening to this, if this is work that you've been doing or work that you're just stepping into and you're noticing, oh wow, there's this behavior work I could be doing with my kids. It's really about a process similar to doing yoga. It's just like do a little bit and learn. And by doing, you will learn and you will become stronger at it. And I think obviously you're very skilled at all of this and I think it's a very good reminder for everyone who's listening for sure.

Mandy Grass ([13:28](#)):

But I also screw it up regularly and it's hard to see when you're in it. My friend was over the other day talking about my 4-year-old and he is like, you're having a lot of attention for that. And I was like, huh?

Right. You don't always notice it. And it isn't completely fluid like that. You just try to catch those patterns when they occur.

Becky Reback ([13:48](#)):

And when you do catch yourself, you're like, Ooh, right. I've tried to start in the same vein of like, oh, I realized I'm doing X, Y, z. I'm talking to myself, but out loud hear that too. Especially my daughter. I mean my other two are little. I have a three-year-old and a six month old, so it's a different game there. But my daughter is a functional human. She's seven because she needs to be working on all this too, right? This catch yourself self-talk, realizing what you're doing, acknowledging it, all that kind of stuff. And so I'm trying very hard to model that for her. It's really hard because also it's hard to catch yourself, by the way.

Mandy Grass ([14:28](#)):

Well, that's the thing. One of the things I will often say is I'm feeling really overstimulated right now. The baby crying or my 4-year-old whining and the Alexa's going and the dog's barking and two other kids are talking to me at the same time. So again, trying to name that now when I see my kids do it, it makes me giggle. But it was like, I'm overstimulated. And I was like, okay, same. But then also the other thing for me is apologizing. Yes, our kids apologize, all that. But for me, I really want it to be focused on replacement behavior. Even with sibling conflict, even between myself, I'm like, I'm sorry, really working on the, but you right. I'm sorry that I lost my cool. And instead of, but you weren't listening, being like, next time I will take a deep breath or I need to work on going into the other room and coming back or whatever. That might look like. I have so much more I could say. But my oldest has a DHD, so she's like, you are giving me too many directions at once. I'm good for her though.

Becky Reback ([15:27](#)):

All right.

Mandy Grass ([15:28](#)):

So she has a DH, adhd, we use Alexa, we use visuals, we use lists, we use all of that. And the other day we went to the beach and we go to the beach every Friday and I was like, this did not go smoothly. And Lola goes, we should make a list. And I was like, all right. So I was driving, I was like, here's my phone, I want the cooler and then the bags and let's write. And then the girls the next day were like, where's our list? And they could pack themselves. So finding those tools along the way can be helpful.

Becky Reback ([15:53](#)):

And building that independence I feel like is so important. I have made my daughter set up independently with a lot of things and I'm like washed my hands of it. I'm like, I'm done here. Mommy's teeth stepping out.

Mary Miele ([16:05](#)):

I remember when I was doing my learning specialist work many years ago now, but I was working with a family who had three kids and the mom was also talking about how she was overwhelmed at that time. Of course my kids were younger and I was like, I get you. And something I taught her was that you can make a visual schedule for your child who couldn't read at the time, and this will help that child to become more independent so you don't have to do all of the things for them. Taking pictures of the different steps like you did with the list of the phone, that's so helpful to release you from actually having to be their executive function provider and also help with some of those behaviors.

Mandy Grass (16:46):

We use Alexa for everything. And again, the mental load of the mom to remember all of that. I posted about this one day and someone's like, aren't you making them reliant on that? I was like, I am reliant on my calendar. This is a healthy reliance, not me, was human and lots of errors along the way.

Becky Reback (17:04):

I always find it funny when people, because I have the skylight calendar and I'm beyond obsessed with it. If it's not in there, it doesn't happen and everyone knows to check it. But I've had similar questions and I say, well, at work you don't walk into a meeting or presentation without notes. Why do you expect moms or kids to just know to do things? It's a note, it's a reminder. I don't know. I find that to be so interesting in life. You have a post-it note with you probably.

Mary Miele (17:29):

Yeah, I mean executive functioning work, which is more my expertise, you absolutely have a post-it note size working memory and anything else is not going to be stored there. So you can't be expected to remember everything and everybody has a different size. So I feel that really makes a lot of sense. I think it's great. Let's normalize it. Let's do it. Well, let's get to some of the other questions that I had. This is such great stuff. So let's talk about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. So just to define these words in case this is your first time learning about them. So first do that and then kind of talk to us a little bit about what they have to do with what we're talking about. Maybe summer work or just how can parents utilize these concepts in their parenting?

Mandy Grass (18:15):

So intrinsic motivation would be motivation that comes from within that you just inherently have an external motivation. It relies on an external factor of some sort, would argue a little bit that even intrinsic motivation. And when you talk about it in terms of behavior terms like well, she just wants to, okay, well does she want to avoid getting in trouble? Was mom's praise enough? All of those sort of things. I often get criticism. I do recommend different behavior charts and things like that about external motivation. Oh, that's a hot debate in parenting in general. But my question back is what do you do then if intrinsic motivation doesn't inherently exist? If that's not your child, what do you do? And so my recommendation is you pair it with something external and you're super intentional about how you do that using things like intermittent reinforcement. So it's not on a set schedule, it's more random. And then we have to be intentional about fading. I potty trained all of my kids with m and ms controversially, I know, but none of them need m and ms to go to the bathroom anymore. So I don't directly explicitly remember being like, okay, we're not going to, it just sort of faded naturally. So I paired external motivation to increase their internal motivation. And now obviously the bathroom's not a problem, but the same concept applies to other behaviors in your home.

Mary Miele (19:28):

That makes sense. I mean I think ultimately there are certain things that maturity also provides your brain to be able to have more intrinsic motivation. Is it true that there are certain things that a young age that you would expect a child to have in terms of intrinsic motivation that would be more developmentally appropriate? I assume there's certain things they want to eat obviously and they need to sleep. Does that qualify as intrinsic motivation or tell me more about what do we expect them to be doing

Mandy Grass (19:59):

So Sure. I mean I think it's different for each kid. If you have a kid that's super motivated by food or very hungry or likes a variety of things, they might be more motivated by that. But I've worked with picky

eaters who you could offer me a million dollars. I'm not eating that goldfish. So it really depends on the individual and it's usually not like a blanket statement. There's pockets of things that they're more motivated by, but there are even some kids that parents will be like they're motivated by nothing. And so it's a little bit trickier determine how we might build some of that intrinsic motivation. But to your point about executive functioning in the A DHD kiddo pairing external motivation and then them realizing that this is a lot easier or I'm not feeling like I'm always treading water, that motivation can take over. Ultimately I'm dyslexic and I was an executive functioning hot, hot mess. My parents dream through every hoop ever, but now I am type A because I got to a point where I was like, I can't keep drowning like this. So my daughter is A DHD and she has some executive functioning deficit, so we're going to have to try variety things to determine what works for her. But yeah, it'll alleviate some of that internal burden. But until that's alleviated, you sometimes don't even know it exists. It's true.

Becky Reback (21:15):

And what about, maybe I'm jumping ahead to maybe crossing over with some of the other things that we're going to ask and talk about, but what about, you mentioned the kids that just don't have, they're not motivated by much or it's hard to know what they're motivated by. What about the kids that are super motivated for a very short period of time and then I hear a lot from clients and friends and I mean even sometimes my own kids and then whatever you're using, whether it's external, internal, it stops working. So it's like, and then how do

Mandy Grass (21:47):

We fix that? So that sometimes has to do with the ratio of reinforcement schedule you're put on. So if you're doing a one-to-one, a kids can also get satiated or let's say for example, you are doing making your bed and if your kid makes their bed by Friday, they earn something. If that criteria is not realistic, they might just give up if that reinforcement is available. So for example, I will tell parents often not to use money because if grandma comes over and gives 'em five bucks, if it's their birthday and they get 20 bucks, they're not as motivated. One day we couldn't find the remote and I joked, I was like, whoever hits five bucks and my oldest was literally, that was my birthday last week, don't, I'm like, that's an example of you need to isolate reinforcement and you should try your best.

(22:31):

Easier said than done, but to be as intentional as possible about the schedule of reinforcement you're putting in place with the ultimate goal being fading. So intermittent reinforcement is a slot machine. It's the strongest form of reinforcement, which is also really wonderful, the easiest to implement for parents because it's not like, oh my gosh, did you brush your teeth? Did you make your bed? Did dad check it? I don't remember now it's Tuesday, let's just wait till next week. It's like, oh, I saw you doing this right now. Great job. I saw this right now. Great job. Now we have to be a little bit more intentional about catching those things, but that schedule of reinforcement is much more sustainable for everyone. So just saying

Mary Miele (23:08):

Great job

Mandy Grass (23:09):

Is kind of the idea. So just basically reinforcing behavior. You want to see more of randomly. Now it's easy to do randomly because it's impossible to catch it, but even if you wanted to do making the bed instead of being Monday, you get something, Tuesday, you get something, Wednesday you get something. They might be like, I got a three days in a row, I don't care. Instead of being like, you get it at the end of the week, it might be like, oh, I caught you making your bed today. Nice job. Here's whatever

you're doing personally. We have star charts. There's a star in your chart. And then if that's a behavior you want to see more of, you're going to be more intentional about catching it regularly. If you start to establish a good pattern and that's less significant, you might be more intentional about, I don't know, the shoes on the stairs or the clothes, the hamper or whatever your current focus might be.

Mary Miele ([23:49](#)):

Do you ever put it in the kids' hands? For instance, with one of my kids, I remember back in the day, whatever, we had one of these jars actually have it. I have one here that I'm using for something else, but one of these things and what you do is you just put it on them. It's like we had a visual schedule. And so when he would go through the different tasks, I mean if he didn't remember to do it, oh well, but he got pretty engaged with it, at least it routine eyes, the process to the point then where we knew what to do in the morning. But is that something that you would play around with too?

Mandy Grass ([24:21](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. So I also work in a public school, and so we often work on around fourth or fifth grade self-assessing, having the teacher assess their behavior or if you're doing a variety of different things and then having them assess and compare to see if we can get, again, ultimately you want to work on that. To your point about filling the jar, same thing. Sometimes we introduce a visual and the parents will be like, they didn't do it. I'm like, well, we still have to teach the visual, so that might mean we have to reinforce each step for a bit. And then we reinforce two steps being chained, and then we reinforce the whole schedule. We have to meet our kids where they're at and build up from there. Sometimes we can get stuck in a like, but I gave you a visual, but we all also need to work on the steps leading up to the completion of the entire task.

Becky Reback ([25:02](#)):

I think that's so key too though, is teaching parents, we want our kids to have this motivation to do this. You as a parent or a caregiver have to spend or a teacher whatever, have to spend time teaching into what you want.

([25:19](#)):

I'm pretty routinized in my home and my daughter happens to be really intrinsically motivated just by praise. I mean we do an allowance system and all that kind of stuff, and she's really motivated by it, so it works. But even me saying, Hey, I noticed you X, Y, Z today, really motivated her. She's a people pleaser. So I kind of use that to my benefit sometimes and it works, but I have a lot of friends that have tried to mimic my routine. I've sent them my charts and stuff, and then they're like, oh, it worked for a week. And I was like, but did you remain consistent with that? Because if you want your kids to continue with that motivation, there is a little bit on the parent. As much as we want the kids to be independent, and it depends on the age too, especially with younger kids, the parents still needs to be engaged with it to provide, so the kid continues to be motivated, right?

Mandy Grass ([26:09](#)):

Absolutely. I mean, that's why I think sometimes parents burn themselves out. So we have to prioritize the behaviors we want to focus on. For example, opening their shades has been on my children's list for three years. We have not mastered it. And that is on me because it takes, I don't know, I just go in and open the shade or whatever that looks like. But parents, sometimes I'll meet with them and I tend to word vomit, and now I'm trying really hard to spend the last few minutes being like, okay, these are the things we're going to focus on over the next two weeks. Because a lot of them be like, all right, tomorrow I'm going to hit the ground running. And if you try to start fighting every battle of a behavior that's existed for eight years, you're going to give up before noon. So instead being like, let's focus on bedtime or let's focus

on responding to this one behavior super consistently, let's gain some momentum and then let's try the next one and the next one or whatever that might look like. Yeah, start

Becky Reback ([26:58](#)):

Small for sure. So it's realistic for

Mandy Grass ([27:00](#)):

Everybody, so it's reinforcing for the parents as well, so you can see that change and feel motivated to keep going.

Mary Miele ([27:05](#)):

Definitely. I mean, I've been thinking a lot about this, especially there was an article that Becky and I were talking about earlier regarding the a DD research that's come out, and it seems like what we're kind of coming to pretty clearly is that children are going to have to work on skills over time. There isn't really a pill or something we can just give them to get them to do what they need to be doing in terms of their functioning. And I think ultimately it makes me think about the care of the parents and about how much this requires support in terms of someone like you, Mandy, in terms of having somebody to say, this is how much you can put on your plate. Realistically, let's not deal with this right now. I remember I was working with Becky, remember with CPS work, and she really helped me to understand that part. I remember in my parenting work, I was trying to do far too many things as well, and just having that list in front of you to say, okay, these are all the unsolved problems, these are all the things that you're really worried about. Let's just pick one thing and work through it successfully. Let's let everything else go. And in some ways for really involved parents, high achieving parents, parents who are really invested, it can be hard to make those kinds of choices. Do you find that to be true?

Mandy Grass ([28:25](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. So a lot of my work is on prioritizing. And so I'll meet with both parents and I'll say to them, alright, we've just laid out, like you said, 15 problems, 15 things we want to work on. And again, I'm like, well, we could try this and we try this, we could try this. And then the last few minutes it's like, where do you want to start? What is your main focus? And then depending on what level of oversight they want, let's come back in two weeks and really talk about what that looks like. And to your point too about overachieving parents or really involved parents, can you recognize the incremental change that is happening as well? Do we see that we are taking steps towards this being more independent rather than in two weeks being like, well, they don't do it all by themselves yet, but okay, but are they doing three out of five steps or where are we headed with that data?

Mary Miele ([29:13](#)):

Yeah, I can imagine that kind of feedback is also very reinforcing, right? I mean, it's hard to know sometimes as parents, it's very easy to get into the weeds and I think that it's very difficult to take yourself out and see the progress that you've made and also to readjust yourself as you go forward. Because of course, you're a learning human being too. You're evolving and they're evolving. And ultimately, I'm sure week to week the you're working with one week to the next are different. And there's a lot of that, I don't know what to call it, gray space that's sort of working in this kind of process. And I wanted to make sure we talked about it because I think anyone who's listening, who is thinking about even just a simple question, how do I get my kid to be motivated to do this summer work that we need to be doing this summer?

([30:01](#)):

Or how do I get my child to be motivated to write their college essays or to clean up after we have dinner? It feels like what we're trying to really say to people is, there are certain tools and strategies that you can learn and you can be helped with someone like you to work through what you need to be doing to help your child. And that's the answer. That's what we're all signing up for actually. And whether your child has a DHD or not, you need to be in there, like Becky said, teaching your child what they need to be doing in the way they're going to learn best, which is tough

Mandy Grass ([30:36](#)):

Stuff. Yeah. And that's where I think understanding the function of behavior, being able to look at it from more of a behavioral lens, because we personalize a lot of that. I did it today, my car, I was like, you guys don't care that the car's messy. I'm personalizing something that's not personal. So again, what's the replacement behavior when we get home, everybody needs to throw out the door. We need, we have a little garbage in the car, whatever that looks like. But to take a step back and figure out, okay, what intervention do I need to put in place here? Because we often, especially talking about teenagers with college essays or cleaning up, we just get toe to toe. You should, and I'll wait you out until you do, instead of, alright, well what's the skill that's lacking or what's the motivation we can add in here?

Mary Miele ([31:21](#)):

Yeah. What do you think, Becky?

Becky Reback ([31:24](#)):

I mean, I think so many things. Yeah, I'm curious. I mean I think that the skill and the motivation really go hand in hand

([31:33](#)):

And you can be a motivated person, but if you don't have the skill, it probably won't happen in the way that you or someone else maybe thinks it should happen. And so I think you need to examine all of this together and really put them together. So yes, you need to have the motivation, whether it's internal or external, whether you're doing reinforcements or the kid naturally wants to do it, but then you have to be able to support or bolster the skill alongside that. And so I think that using motivation to teach and reinforce a skill is when we're actually moving the needle and getting our kids to a different place. And I think that Mandy, you definitely wouldn't know more than me, but I think that people think behavior is a silo, but there's so much that goes into it. And behavior often is a signal that there's something else deeper going on and that we have this skill that we're lacking, and so we have to figure out how to marry the two so the child gains moves forward, is gaining momentum, whatever it might be. Do you agree with that?

Mandy Grass ([32:44](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And I think let's take the cleaning the room, for example, A DHD or not a DH, adhd. That can be a really ambiguous term or maybe I feel like no matter what I do, mom isn't going to say it's done, so I'm just going to avoid doing it completely. So it's not like you lacks motivation. It's like if I don't do it at all, nobody can tell me it's wrong type of thing, versus, Hey, let's work on your floor being clear or your laundry being in your drawers and being super measurable about what exactly that looks like. Another that comes up a lot with middle and high schoolers with go study. I'm like, don't send them a, I say that all the time. I was just going to say it if you didn't. Yeah, what does that look like? Is it flashcards, is it Quizlet? Is it writing it out? We need to define this. And that's what I'm talking about with the teaching. And I understand it because I had dyslexia. I'm a special education teacher, now I'm a behavior analyst. But sometimes people miss that step and it's like we need to be more explicit with our kids. Or they'll sit in the room and stare at the wall and be like, yeah, I studied for 20 minutes. And they might actually think they did. Right.

Becky Reback (33:46):

Well also, I mean, we talk a lot here and I think all of this is so ingrained in each other, but we talk a lot about that, Mary, exactly where I'm going, the total educational process, my favorite image in the world where you have what happens at home, what happens at school, and what happens in the middle. And I think everyone thinks, if I say to my kid, go study, well, they're in school for eight hours learning how to study, they should know what to do. But a lot of the times they don't or there's a skill lacking or they're missing information or school is not actually focusing on teaching them how to study. Right? I mean, there's a lot we could say about that too, but the executive functions is unfortunately not as prominent in schools as it probably should be. And so understanding that you have to marry the home and the school and school cannot do everything. It's just not possible. And you have to find that sweet spot between them and understand not only the sweet spot between them, but what is the sweet spot for your particular child and child A and your family is very different than child B and child C. And so knowing each child and what they need and what motivates them and what their lagging skills are, I mean, you have a whole different perspective on parenting and your children when you can understand that.

Mary Miele (35:02):

Absolutely. It's really great stuff. And so I'm going to go ahead and scroll down because we have a couple of more technical type questions we'll get into and then we'll close things out for everyone. But just to give you a little bit more to go on, if you're interested in developing some more skills, we talked already about the intrinsic support such as reinforcement, and you were talking about intermittent rewards such as great job whenever you notice them doing something that you want them to be doing. So talk a little bit about how you could fade that out. So let's say I'm going to try, I'm going to step in, and when my child is putting away their toys, we've talked about it, I taught them how to do it, where to put the toys, and I see them doing it and I'm like, great job. And we're kind of all working on this maybe for a month. What's the fade out process look like?

Mandy Grass (35:52):

Well, so two things, generalization and fading. So do we generalize that skill to also putting your toothbrush away or putting your clothes in the hamper? And then are we less intentional? Do we try to catch it and happening in other pockets less frequently than the really explicit cleaning up the toys that we taught? And then with that intermittent, the idea of the intermittent is doing it randomly, and then you just sort of start to get a little bit more random. Now, this is not completely linear. There'll be times where you're like, oh, shoot, I need to focus on this a little bit more. We've slipped. And there'll be times where you're like, Hey, we're in a good place. I'm going to focus on the toothbrush or the dirty clothes or the drawers or whatever that might look like.

Mary Miele (36:29):

Oh, that's cool. Yeah. So I get it. So you basically are kind of assessing patterns again, so you're looking at where those behaviors are happening over time. And if they're slipping, then you can always go backwards and fill in the gaps again if you need to.

Mandy Grass (36:44):

Absolutely.

Mary Miele (36:45):

Yeah. Makes sense. So the next question just is, what are some common mistakes that you see parents or educators making when they're trying to motivate children, and how can we shift some of those approaches?

Mandy Grass (36:57):

I think the biggest one, we've already touched on this a little bit, is the like, but you can, so if a child is not showing a skill, despite if they can do it, if you're talking about a 4-year-old dressing or you're talking about a teenager doing homework, we tend to dig our heels in and be like, you can do it, and I will wait until you do it instead of when a regression is exhibited. My advice is to decrease your expectations, come in contact with reinforcement and work your way back up. If it's a skill they already possess. For example, let's say dressing my 4-year-old stopped wanting to dress by herself, they'll bounce back quickly. But what happens is we tend to dig our heels in and then it tends become a bigger monster, a power struggle, more attention versus decreasing our expectations,

Mary Miele (37:38):

The decreasing the expectations. I get that it's hard to do. It is. Yeah.

Becky Reback (37:42):

I also think also, I mean, yes, definitely decreasing, but maybe for a mindset shift for parents, it's changing your expectation.

(37:52):

I think the word decreasing, the expectation scares people. I should hold them to a high standard. I have to expect this because I know they can do it. But it's like you're dealt the hand, your doubt with your kid, and you have to meet them where they are at that moment. And so yes, my kids have many skills, but sometimes it's just not working. And so I have to change how I'm approaching them and what I'm expecting of them in that moment. My three, almost four year fully can dress himself, but some mornings he comes over to me and is like, mommy, can you help me today? And I'm like, yes. And then it's no big deal. And by the way, I start and then he usually finishes, but he wants my connection, he wants my attention, whatever it is, there's a baby at home and I'm always cooing over the baby or dealing with my 7-year-old. He's my poor middle kid, and sometimes he just wants me to put his shirt on and that's okay. And I have to change and adjust based on moods and whatever else is going on in that day and that time period. And we know that everything is a phase with children. And so I think changing just for that mindset shift of it's okay that I'm adjusting this slightly. We'll get back to it.

Mandy Grass (39:06):

And I think the word temporarily too, temporarily change those expectations. We get stuck in these extremes. This is not forever. And the thing is, my kids had a sleep regression, nobody was getting up the mornings. So I fought it for a week, and then I was like, all right, we went to the dollar store, everybody picked out five items under \$2, and they lived on the counter. And I did a hard reset and I was like, when you are up and dressed by seven, you get that item. That was all it took. The next week. I was like, okay, three out of five days. And after that, I don't remember doing it at all. And it was also partly my fault for not getting out of bed. I dug my heels until I was finally like, let's take a different approach. Okay, we're going to add some reinforcement, we're going to get back to where we need to be. And two weeks later, it wasn't a problem anymore.

Becky Reback (39:47):

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I think similarly too, it's thinking about where your child is in that moment. My daughter, no matter how many times, I'm like, put your clothes in your hamper, put the top back on your toothpaste. All that stuff makes me crazy. I'm such a neat freak. And she is my husband and they do not care if everything is a mess, and it makes me insane. And so instead of just continually nagging her, which by the way, she also hates, and I was just getting angry that I had to keep reminding her. I made a did you chart? And I posted it in her room and for a little bit of time again, was looping back. I had to

teach into the chart. But now if she's slipping, I just, I say, check your, did you chart? So I don't actually have to do any of the reminding. She can be independent with it, but every once in a while, like you said, I need to adjust and decrease and shift my expectations for whatever reason, she had a long day at camp. She's tired, whatever. She's going through a gross spurt. I don't know. But I mean, it's the same thing where then she kind of gets herself back on track. That little burst of the external motivation sometimes goes a really long way.

Mandy Grass ([40:54](#)):

Similarly, my daughter loves a good lotion shampoo, so she's the potion queen. And last summer I just kept, I was like, I just bought that. And so finally somebody else pointed it out to me and I got her a bucket and I filled it with little travel size. And I was like, this is your experiment bucket. You can do whatever you want in that bucket. Leave it outside your room. I'll refill the bucket. Don't touch the shower stuff anywhere. This is your bucket. And that eliminated all of the mess. I was like, okay, you want to make a mess? Here's the context to make it more appropriately. So it's not driving me nuts. But again,

Becky Reback ([41:29](#)):

I love that.

Mandy Grass ([41:29](#)):

Dug my feet in for a while, being like, why are you doing this? Until I was like, give her an appropriate place to do it.

Becky Reback ([41:34](#)):

Yeah. So interesting. My daughter has recently taken up blow drying her hair. She's seven. I'm like, why do you need to do this at seven? But my blow dryers are everywhere in my bathroom. Can you put them away? But maybe I'll give a little bin or something.

Mary Miele ([41:50](#)):

That's a good idea. Yeah. I like it. I like giving them some space for whatever you need to have out of your space. Yeah, that's great. Well, this has been very helpful. I really hope everyone listening has had some aha moments and just also learned some strategies and tools to be able to address behaviors that you're seeing in your children as well as yourself. And if you would like, I would love to give Mandy a moment to share a little bit about where you can find her in case you'd like to do that. And I'll also give Becky the chance to do the same. And we'll start with you, Mandy.

Mandy Grass ([42:29](#)):

Sure. So you could find me on Instagram at the Family behaviorist, my website, the family behaviorist.com. I offer parent coaching. I offer groups, and I also have a behavior basics video course to help you understand how to respond to any behavior through understanding the functions of behavior.

Mary Miele ([42:44](#)):

Nice. Really helpful. And Becky?

Becky Reback ([42:47](#)):

Yes. Well, Mandy, thank you so much for being on with us. I feel like I could have sat in this conversation for three more hours. So this is my favorite topic, Mary's too. So we definitely digressed a bunch, but you can find me here at Evolve Education Company. I am the Director of academic

assessments, and I do parent education, not what Mandy does. I can do school-based parent education. So if you're having any type of educational need or problem, we are probably a good compliment to each other where Mandy does the behavior function. And I'm here working on how we approach school and how we manage this and work with our kids and all of that

Mary Miele ([43:21](#)):

On that total educational process,

Becky Reback ([43:23](#)):

On that total educational process. So yeah, that's me, Becky, at evolved ed.com, or you can just go on the Evolved website and you can find me.

Mary Miele ([43:32](#)):

Yeah. Amazing. Well, thank you so much everybody, and I hope everyone did enjoy this episode. We look forward to you accessing the show notes where you can find everything that we discussed.

Mandy Grass ([43:44](#)):

Thank you so much for having me. Hope you guys have a nice day. Thank you. All right.

Mary Miele ([43:52](#)):

We hope you found this episode of Be Evolved helpful. If you did, please be sure to review and subscribe. It really helps us to reach more listeners like you want to dive deeper into Pacific Strategies. Join me on Super Cast as a subscriber for just \$5 a month. You'll get access to my private weekly feed where I share exclusive ideas and answer audience questions about learning and admissions. Have a question or comment I'd love to hear from you. You can reach out anytime at admin@evolveded.com. That's A-D-M-I-N at E-V-O-L-V-E-D ed.com. And don't forget, you can find the full transcript for today's episode along with our terms, conditions, and disclaimers and privacy policies at www.evolvededucationcompany.com. Thanks for listening, and until next time, stay curious, stay empowered, learn well, live well, and Be Evolved.